



*R.W.E.*

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## EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

### John Muir and Emerson's *Poems*

J. PARKER HUBER  
Brattleboro, Vermont

May 9th is celebrated for the communion of two prophets, John Muir and Ralph Waldo Emerson, in Yosemite Valley. In 1871, they toured and talked together for four days before Emerson left.<sup>1</sup> They enjoyed each other's company immensely. They spoke of plants and geology and poets. On the last day, they visited the Mariposa Grove of sequoias, where Muir wanted them to camp, but Emerson's companions refused in deference to his venerableness' well-being. Muir then spent the night alone there, thankful for the birds and beasts and the presence of Emerson's spirit.

This was Emerson's only trip to California. Twenty-two years later, 8 June 1893, Muir made a pilgrimage to Emerson's home, Concord, Massachusetts, the sage having died in 1882. There he walked about the hamlet and Walden and dined with Emerson's son, Edward.<sup>2</sup> Though Muir made four more transcontinental trips to New England, he never returned to Concord. Each at least experienced the sanctuary of the other, if only once.

On one of those four days that Emerson and members of his party were together with Muir, the latter received a gift: a copy of Emerson's *Poems* (Ticknor & Fields, 1864)<sup>3</sup> inscribed "John Muir from S.S Forbes." This is Sarah Swain Hathaway Forbes (1813-1900), wife of John Murray Forbes (1813-1898) of Milton, Massachusetts.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Forbes made possible the Muir-Emerson connection by proposing and financing Emerson's railroad excursion to California in spring 1871. Four Forbes children accompanied their parents on this journey with Emerson: Alice, Sarah, Mary, and William. Six years earlier on 3 October 1865, the latter had married Emerson's younger daughter Edith, who was also part of this entourage, while her sister Ellen cared for their three children, her sick brother Edward, and mother Lidian back east in Concord.

Customarily, Emerson presented copies of his books to friends, noting recipients in his journal. He had given Mrs. Forbes *The Conduct of Life* (Ticknor and Fields, December 1860), *May-Day and Other Pieces* (Ticknor and Fields,

April 1867), *Society and Solitude* (Fields, Osgood, March 1870). Possibly, then, he had given her his *Poems*, though I find no reference.

Apparently, she had read *Poems*. At least on the "Contents" pages she marked and/or dated ten titles: "1869" (four poems: "Woodnotes, I," "Forerunners," "Ode to Beauty," and "Merlin, I"); "6th February 1871" (one poem: "Each and All"); "Feb 1871" (one poem: "Initial, Daemonic, and Celestial Love"); "Feb" (one poem: "Threnody"); "1871" (three poems: "Hymn, Sung at the Completion of the Concord Monument," "The Rhodora," "Bacchus")—all dates prior to her meeting Muir (with the unlikely exception of 1871). The "F" in February also matches the "F" in holograph "Forbes" of the inscription. All four of the poems dated 1869 include a penciled "x" between date and title, while the last three of these on their respective pages have an "x" or "+" at or near their first lines. "Hymn..." has a tiny, unexplainable, penciled upper case "B" between the title and first line. Lines 9 and 10 of "Each and All" on page 14 are joined with a penciled squiggle in the left margin.

Muir read *Poems* some time in May, June, July. "Several times," he told Emerson in early July 1871. "I have been very deeply interested with them and am far from being done with them." They all were new to him, except "Woodnotes," which their mutual friend Jeanne Carr had introduced to him, and "The Humble-Bee." I assume he means both "Woodnotes I" and "Woodnotes II."<sup>5</sup>

Muir, no indoor naturalist, felt free to edit his mentor. In "Woodnotes II" he underlined "grass" of "Yesterday was a bundle of grass," adding to its right "a fern" [91/48]<sup>6</sup> In "Each and All," Muir pencilled "(thrills)" beneath the textual "pleases" of

He sings the song, but it pleases not now,  
For I did not bring home the river and sky;— [14/9]

He also made his own index, a practice he continued throughout his life. On the rear fly leaf at top left Muir has written in pencil "39." referring to the poem "Alphonso

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## 1998 EMERSON SOCIETY PATRONS

Emerson Society members have responded generously to the appeal by Past President Ronald A. Bosco to join at new levels of membership. All donations above the \$10 annual regular membership go to support the "Emerson in 2003" Bicentennial celebration now being organized. Dues categories are Life (\$500), Sustaining (\$50), Contributing (\$25), and Regular (\$10). Please send check payable to The Emerson Society (U.S. dollars only) to Wesley T. Mott, Secretary/Treasurer, Dept. of Humanities & Arts, WPI, Worcester, MA 01609-2280.

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## EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

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For future issues of *Emerson Society Papers* we solicit information about editions, publications, and research in progress on Emerson and his circle; queries and requests for information in aid of research in these fields; and significant news (promotions, transfers, retirements, deaths, etc.) of Emersonian scholars. We will also consider notes and short articles (about 4 to 5 double-spaced typewritten pages, or less) on subjects of interest to our membership. MLA stylesheet is preferred. Send manuscripts to the editor, Douglas Emory Wilson, 1404 Christine Ave., Anniston, AL 36207-3924.

Review copies of books on Emerson should be sent to book review editor Sarah Ann Wider, Department of English, Colgate University, Hamilton, NY 13346.

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## John Muir and Emerson's *Poems*

(Continued from page 1)

of Castile," of which Muir marks with a vertical line to the right of the lines:

There, growing slowly old at ease,  
No faster than his planted trees, [39/22]

His only other index item in this volume is:

"43. Up mind thine own aim, and  
God speed the mark"

which refers to the concluding lines of the poem "To J. W.," which is not marked on page 43.<sup>7</sup>

Muir kept in touch with Sarah S. Forbes after she returned to Massachusetts. He sent her



John Muir  
Courtesy, Erica Tworog

seeds and bulbs, which she had her gardener care for until the ground thawed. She had "been passing a few weeks in Florida with Mr. Forbes." She "imagine[s]" the Yo Semite in its winter grandeur." Hearing that Yellowstone will be preserved, she wishes this status for "all the finest of our scenery, for we are not a sufficiently poetical people to revere such beauty & wonder as we ought." "Mr. Emerson is well this winter," she closes. "He is getting old now and I fancy will not go

beyond his earlier efforts..." She sent Emerson a note received from Muir and "one of the sprays" he enclosed. She affirmed their bond, "He is always interested in you."<sup>8</sup>

And in the spring of 1872, she informed Muir of the growth of seeds he had sent and she had planted at their home in Milton, Massachusetts. One sequoia was an inch tall. She had "read an account of the earthquake in the Yosemite." Muir had written Emerson about this exciting event on 26 March 1872, the day of its occurrence.<sup>9</sup> She had talked with Asa Gray, who was planning to go to Yosemite, which he did in July of 1872. Mr. Forbes had just left for Fayal (or Faial, an island in Azores, North Atlantic) "to bring my daughter home. We are having the driest of springs..." Closing, she again returned to their esteemed friend: "There is much in Mr. Emerson's writings to admire, yet in him I always feel the want of the genial sympathy with human every day life—if he was musical perhaps he would have a touch of Robbie Burns, which united with his purity of thought would be fine—but each has his own individuality, & each must work that out for himself as best he may."<sup>10</sup> Muir may have told her that Burns was his favorite poet sometime during those Yosemite days of 1871.

The worn condition of the marbled board covers of Muir's volume of Emerson's *Poems* speaks of contact with rock and earth. Though Emerson missed camping with Muir, his *Poems* surely did not. Imagine *Poems* ascending with Muir out of his Yosemite Valley home to the heights of Nevada Fall and Half Dome, accompanying him higher and higher on his alpine glacial work. What scenery these *Poems* saw! What brilliant light they were exposed to! What a baptism they experienced in "God's mountains"! Were they present on the South Fork of the San Joaquin River that late September day of 1873, when Muir named a grand peak for Emerson? I wish they could tell us of their memories.

### Notes

1. There are several accounts of this meeting. Those by Emerson and Muir and James Bradley Thayer, who accompanied Emerson west, are the primary ones. Secondary versions are provided by biographers, such as John McAleer, *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Days of Encounter* (Little, Brown, 1984), 597-609. A fine recent contribution is by Michael P. Branch, "'Angel guiding gently'..." *Western American Literature*, August 1997, 126-149.
2. See Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* (Harvard University Press), 316-318. The date of their meeting is Thursday 8 June 1893, not Thursday 7 June 1893, as given. Muir was 55 then, not "almost exactly the same age as Thoreau when he died [44]." They were entertained at the home of John Shepard Keyes, whose diary in the Concord Public Library records this event.
3. It was originally published by James Monroe & Company in 1846, though dated 1847 (an English edition preceded this by 13 days). For publication history see Joel Myerson, *Ralph Waldo Emerson: A Descriptive Bibliography* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), 155-158, and "Note on the Texts" by Harold Bloom and Paul Kane in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Collected Poems and Translations* (The Library of America, 1994), 570 [hereafter RWE: CP&T].
4. Little of John Muir's collection of Emerson is in the public domain. *Self-Reliance* (1902) is at the Huntington and *Prose Works* (1870) is at the Beinecke of Yale University. I am indebted to Stan Hutchinson of Sierra Madre, California, the current owner of Emerson's *Poems*, for graciously revealing this treasure to me, and to Professor Ronald Limbaugh of the University of the Pacific for directing me to him.
5. Swain was her mother's maiden name; Lydia Swain married Stephen Hathaway of New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1804. The Forbeses had six children, one of whom was also named Sarah (3 July 1853—23 January 1917), who married William Hughes 16 February 1887. As far as I can determine, she had no middle name. She was 18 at the time of this trip. Later she edited *Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes* (Houghton Mifflin, 1899), which mentions their California journey, but not Muir (II:176), and gives some of the Forbes-Emerson correspondence.
6. Letter, John Muir to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 6 July 1871, Yosemite Valley, in John Muir Papers, Holt-Atherton Department of Special Collections, University of the Pacific Libraries, Stockton, California (hereafter, HASC). All quotations from unpublished material in the John Muir Collections are made by permission of HASC, copyright 1984 Muir-Hanna Trust.
7. Page numbers of *Poems*: first is Muir's Ticknor and Fields edition (1864); second is The Library of America edition (1994). Two extraneous marks also occur on page 84 of "Woodnotes, II".
8. John Weiss (1818-79) of Massachusetts, Unitarian pastor, writer, and German translator ("Notes" by Harold Bloom and Paul Kane, RWE: CP&T, 591). In Ticknor and Fields edition, exclamations follow the first and last words of these two lines. In the Library of America edition, a comma replaces the first exclamation, and "heed" replaces "mind".
9. Letter, S.S. Forbes to John Muir [Winter 1872, Boston, Massachusetts], HASC. I cannot locate Muir's letter to her.
10. Letter, John Muir to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 26 March 1872, Yosemite Valley, HASC.
11. Letter, S.S. Forbes to John Muir, 29 April 1872, Milton Hill [Massachusetts], HASC.



# Emerson, Relatively Speaking

BARRY POSTERRO

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

The questions that Albert Einstein pondered as a boy and that led to the theory of relativity are similar to ones Emerson mentions in the context of ethics in *Nature*. Einstein asked himself "what the world would look like if he could travel astride a speeding light beam, and he also wondered how the wave would appear if he could dismount and travel beside it at the same velocity."<sup>1</sup> Emerson's proposition is uncannily similar. "What new thoughts are suggested by seeing a face of country quite familiar, in the rapid movement of the rail-road car!"<sup>2</sup> Both men were philosophically exploring the idea of perspective and point of view. Emerson would continue to speak on the subject and propose questions for his readers and audiences to ponder, while young Einstein would need to study to the age of 26 in order to acquire the necessary mathematical background to answer his questions in the form of theories and equations.

Facing the waning years of his life, on 31 August 1872 Emerson reflects on aspirations that time could not afford him:

I thought today, in these rare seaside woods, that if absolute leisure were offered me, I should run to the College or the Scientific school which offered the best lectures on Geology, chemistry, Minerals, Botany, & seek to make the alphabets of those sciences clear to me. How could leisure or labor be better employed.<sup>3</sup>

A current trend in the scholarship on transcendentalism is the exploration of the scientific writings of Henry David Thoreau. However, we should be careful not to limit scientific inquiries to Thoreau. While Thoreau did actual work in surveying and natural history, Emerson also showed evidence of having practical as well as theoretical interests in science. Indeed, Gay Wilson Allen in his book *Waldo Emerson* speculates if there is a link between Emerson and twentieth-century physics.<sup>4</sup> However, Allen, in the process of writing an entire biography of Emerson, only scratches the surface of this topic, which warrants further scholarly research.

In hindsight afforded by 1999, we see that Emerson seems to have foreshadowed trends in scientific thought that would not be realized until the emergence of Albert Einstein. In *Nature*, in declarations such as "the whole is greater than its part," and "the smallest weight may be made to lift the greatest, the difference of weight being compensated by time," Emerson suggests that we can apply the laws of physics and other sciences to our own moral lives (CW, 1:21-22). In his brief discourse on the subject of the connection between physical and moral laws, Emerson con-

cludes, "These propositions have a much more extensive and universal sense when applied to human life, than when confined to a technical use" (CW, 1:22).

Einstein understandably was more concerned with the scientific aspects of his studies than with the moral applications of his research. Prior to the theory of relativity, mass and energy were regarded as unique. There were laws regarding the preservation of mass, and there were separate laws concerning the conservation of energy. A major result of the theory of relativity was the connection between mass and energy. The two laws governing the conservation of each were combined into one, known as the conservation law of mass-energy. Probably the most recognized equation to come out of Einstein's studies is the one relating mass and energy,  $E=mc^2$ , where "E" represents energy, "m" represents mass, and "c" represents the speed of light, estimated at 186,000 miles per second. Einstein's formula tells us that the energy possessed in every piece of matter is equivalent to the mass of the object times the square of the speed of light. In other words, all matter is merely energy contained in a solid, tangible state.

Surely, we are not to assume that Emerson had conceptualized this as scientific fact, but he knew still it was philosophically true. The idea set forth by  $E=mc^2$  is consistent with Emerson's thoughts in the chapter "Spirit" in *Nature*. "Idealism saith: matter is a phenomenon, not a substance" (CW, 1:37). In the chapter "Prospects," he remarks, "Nature is not fixed but fluid" (CW, 1:44). Both men are saying that everything that exists now does so in a temporary state. Everything changes, but nothing goes away. Energy can only take on new forms and manifest itself in a different character, though it may still be the same energy we saw earlier. Indeed these facts are consistent with Emerson's sense that "The beauty of nature reforms itself in the mind, and not for barren contemplation, but for new creation" (CW, 1:16).

Another fundamental Emersonian idea that Einstein relates to physics, and which forever changed the science, was that of point of reference. Does our perception of things depend on where we are physically and mentally? "Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind" (CW, 1:18). Emerson writes in *Nature*, "man is hereby apprized, that, whilst the world is a spectacle, something in himself is stable" (CW, 1:31). Emerson considered the observer to be an important part of any observation, because the relation to nature is the basis for the interpretation of the

phenomenon. One of the underlying concepts of relativity theory is that different reference points do lead to unique observations.

For example, Einstein pointed out that should a person, like Emerson, travel away from a clock tower at ten miles per hour, he would be able to observe the time changing on the clock, because the light traveling from the clock to his eyes at 186,000 miles per second will catch up to him and inform him that the clock's hands have moved. However, if Ralph Waldo were to travel away from the clock at a speed faster than 186,000 miles per second, the light from the clock containing the time changes would never catch up to him and whenever he looked at the clock it would still read his original departure time. Does this imply that time has stopped, or even that time has stopped for Emerson? Yes and no. It depends on our traveler's point of reference. According to the clock tower, Emerson sees that time has stopped, but according to his wristwatch, which is traveling with him, time appears to be changing as it always has. Einstein's point is that the system cannot be understood unless the analyst is made aware of the relation between the man and the timepiece he is referencing.

Emerson, strikingly, had already conjectured these principles to be true. "Man is an analogist, and studies relations in all objects. He is placed in the centre of beings, and a ray of relation passes from every other being to him. And neither can man be understood without these objects, nor these objects without man" (CW, 1:19). In other words, both Einstein and Emerson are saying that all things material and mental are relative.

During Einstein's career, the next revolution of ideas in physics was the introduction of quantum theory. The elementary quantum is defined to be the smallest step size by which an amount of a given substance can change. For example, in dealing with money in the United States, the current elementary quantum is one cent. That is, the amount of money in a person's pocket can increase or decrease only by whole number multiples of pennies. Einstein summarizes the basic principle behind quantum theory in one sentence: "It must be assumed that some physical quantities so far regarded as continuous are composed of elementary quanta."<sup>5</sup>

As Einstein conjectured that all things are made up of smaller ones, Emerson believed that our lives too are made up of smaller pieces. This idea of the discontinuity of life Emerson discusses in "The Over-Soul." He writes, "We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE" (CW, 2:160). No one particular resolution determines the course of our entire lives; life is made up of quanta of experiences and choices. The eternal ONE is

formed of these and is beautiful if our choices are beautiful, which Emerson defines by the genuineness of the decision.

In "Compensation," Emerson essentially conceives the idea of the elementary quantum: "Every thing is made of one hidden stuff" (CW, 2:59). Here Emerson is not talking about elementary particles or electrons, but is suggesting that each of us has mental glasses through which we see the world: "The naturalist sees one type under every metamorphosis, and regards a horse as a running man, a fish as a swimming man, a bird as a flying man, a tree as a rooted man" (CW, 2:59). Depending on who we are, we relate everything we see as aggregations of our own personal quantum. "Each new form," Emerson continues, "repeats not only the main character of the type, but part for part all the details, all the aims, furtherances, hindrances, energies and whole system of every other."

As Emerson and other philosophers have an instinctive sense of science, Einstein and other scientists often conceive of and express scientific thoughts through metaphors. However, that there is yet no evidence directly linking Einstein to Emerson serves as powerful support for one of Emerson's best known philosophies.<sup>6</sup> As Emerson explains in several of his essays, a true thought or genuine feeling is eventually realized by all: "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart, is true for all men,—that is genius" (CW, 2:27). Albert Einstein, probably the greatest genius of our century, took what was true in Emerson's heart and made it universally accepted by all in the scientific community. As Emerson declared in "Self-Reliance," "Speak your latent conviction and it shall be the universal sense" (CW, 2:27).

## Notes

1. Leonard Shalin, *Art and Physics: Parallel Visions in Space, Time and Light* (New York: Morrow, 1991), 120.
2. *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 5 vols. to date, ed. Alfred R. Ferguson et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971- ), 1:31. Cited parenthetically hereafter as CW.
3. *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 16, ed. Ronald A. Bosco and Glen M. Johnson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 281.
4. Gay Wilson Allen, *Waldo Emerson* (New York: Viking Press, 1981), 457-578.
5. Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld, *The Evolution of Physics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938), 265.
6. Ralph Waldo Emerson is not indexed or referenced in *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*, 8 vols. to date, ed. John Stachel et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987- ). Emerson was not referenced in books authored by Einstein. While some authors of books about Einstein did reference Emerson, they did not do so in the context of Einstein's having read his works.



## PROSPECTS.



### American Literature Association Conference

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society will present two panels at the tenth annual conference of the American Literature Association in Baltimore, Maryland, on Friday, 28 May. Both sessions will be held in Maryland E:

SESSION I— 1:20–2:35 p.m.

#### Emerson and His Correspondence.

CHAIR: Linck C. Johnson (Colgate Univ.)

“that Muse—so loved—so wild”: Mary Moody Emerson’s Letters on the Poetic Calling,” James W. Armstrong (Northwestern Univ.)

“Conversing with Authority: The Question of Emerson’s Letters,” Sarah Ann Wider (Colgate Univ.)

“Apologies and Silences in Emerson’s Letters,” William Merrill Decker (Oklahoma State Univ.)

SESSION II — 2:45–4:00 p.m.

#### Emerson and His Correspondents: A Discussion.

CHAIR: Len Gougeon, (University of Scranton)

PANELISTS:

Joel Myerson (Univ. of South Carolina) and Ronald A. Bosco (University at Albany, SUNY): “The Brothers Emerson”

Nancy Craig Simmons (Virginia Tech): “Mary Moody Emerson”

Gary L. Collison (Penn State Univ., York): “Theodore Parker”

Susan Belasco (Univ. of Tulsa): “Margaret Fuller”

The ALA conference will be held at the Stouffer Harborplace Hotel in Baltimore on 27–30 May (Thursday through Sunday). An opening party will be held on Thursday evening from 8:00 to 10:00 p.m., with a closing party on Sunday at 5:30 p.m. Pre-registration conference fees will be \$50 (with a special rate of \$10 for independent scholars, retired faculty, and students). The Stouffer Harborplace (410-547-1200) is offering conference rates of \$119 (single), \$129 (double), and \$149 (triple). Holiday Inn Express, 1401 Bloomfield Ave., Baltimore, MD 21227, is also offering a conference rate of \$85 per night for a single or double as well as limited shuttle service to the conference hotel; for reservations call Travel Professionals at 888-293-9441.

Preregistration fees may be sent to Professor Alfred Bendixen, Executive Director, American Literature Association, Dept. of English, California State University, Los Angeles, CA 90032-8110. Inquiries should be sent to the conference director, Laura Skandera-Trombley, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, IA 52402; e-mail: lskander@coe.edu; fax: 319-399-8830.

### News from Japan

Hideo Kawasumi, an Emerson Society member from Tokyo, has published *Dickens and America* (Tokyo: Sairyusha, 1998).

### "Re-Forming Emerson": Concord in July

Program Chair and President-Elect Len Gougeon announces that the Emerson Society’s annual session in Concord, in conjunction with the Annual Gathering of the Thoreau Society, is to be “Re-Forming Emerson.” Three papers will explore Emerson’s career in reform and its influence, bringing forward previously unseen aspects that will contribute, says Professor Gougeon, “to the re-formation of our image of Emerson.”

Elizabeth Addison (Western Carolina Univ.) will speak about the early Quaker influence—especially John Woolman’s—on Emerson’s reform philosophy. Len Gougeon (Univ. of Scranton) will assess “Transcendental Warfare: Emerson, Lincoln, and ‘Fortune of the Republic,’” focusing on Emerson’s 1863 address to demonstrate how deeply involved he was in the Civil War and the politics of Lincoln’s re-election efforts. Joe Thomas (Sam Houston State Univ.) will talk on “Reading Marti Reading Emerson: The Legacy of Reform.” Marti was a late-19th-century Cuban poet and revolutionary leader who was deeply influenced by Emerson.

The panel will be presented on Friday afternoon, 9 July, time and location to be announced. The topic of Emerson and reform, crucial to the ongoing reevaluation of Emerson’s life and thought, is especially timely as the Thoreau Society observes the sesquicentennial of Thoreau’s “Resistance to Civil Government” (“Civil Disobedience”) at its July meeting.

## REVIEW

### The Trials of Anthony Burns: Freedom and Slavery in Emerson’s Boston.

By ALBERT J. VON FRANK, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, xix, 408pp., \$27.95 cloth.

The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in September, 1850, was part of a larger legislative effort known as the “Compromise of 1850.” The avowed purpose of this legislation was to bring an end to growing tensions between slaveholding and free states and, thereby, to preserve the Union. It had the opposite effect. By turning every citizen in every free state into a Federal slave catcher, the legislation made militants out of passivists and virtually assured that every attempt to return a fugitive slave would become a *cause célèbre*. The rendition of Anthony Burns from Boston in the summer of 1854 was one of the most celebrated. As von Frank states, “The Burns case was the heart of a revolution that had its own particular Bastille and riot, that toppled a government in Massachusetts, destroyed certain political parties, and extemporized others” (xiii). It was yet one more step toward what Emerson would call “our second Revolution,” the Civil War.

Von Frank’s masterful and widely researched study unfolds like a Greek tragedy. We all know what is going to happen. The question is, how do we get there? The study is divided into forty-seven short chapters which provide the various strands that will be woven into the fabric of the piece. These include thumbnail sketches of the many key figures, background on the complex legal issues involved, outlines of historical, political and social issues, etc. The narrative begins with the arrest of Burns in late May, 1854. News of this arrest sent an electric shock through the militant abolitionist community of Boston. No slave had been returned from that city since the unfortunate case of Thomas Sims three years earlier, and the Vigilance Committee, under the leadership of Theodore Parker, was determined that it would not happen again. A mass meeting was called and speeches were made by such notables as Horace Mann, William Henry Channing, Wendell Phillips, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. For a period of time the would-be defenders of Burns argued over the best way to secure his freedom, some favoring passive resistance, others insisting on the efficacy of armed resistance.

Eventually the latter, largely through the influence of Higginson, prevailed, and an assault was launched against the court house where Burns was being held. In the ensuing melee a Marshal was killed and the assault was repulsed. Burns’ supporters then turned to the courts for his defense, but despite the articulate arguments of Richard Henry Dana, Jr., which von Frank reports in detail, Burns was remanded to his captors and, under heavy Federal guard, eventually returned to his “owner” in Virginia. Most citizens of Massachusetts were shocked by this course of events, and their resistance to Federal authority, which was now perceived as largely under the influence of the slaveholding states, hardened in anticipation of further and inevitable conflict.

For Emersonians, one of the most interesting aspects of von Frank’s study is the emphasis it places on the influence of Transcendentalism, and Emerson in particular, in fomenting this

social revolution. Several of the major figures directly involved in the case were Transcendentalists. These include such notables as Theodore Parker, T. W. Higginson, Moncure Conway, and Bronson Alcott. Von Frank insists that it was the tangible influence of Emerson’s thought on these major players, and others, which eventually brought them to the forefront in the struggle against slavery. He refers to the abolitionists generally as “romantic reformers” who evince the influence of Emerson and Thoreau in their belief in the superiority of moral law to civil law, and he notes that this “helps to explain why in 1854 the antislavery revolution virtually fell into the hands of the followers of Emerson” (97). Not only was Theodore Parker strongly influenced by Emerson, but other lesser lights “show themselves as responding to, in statement and in action, ...the liberating, progressive quality of Emerson’s thought” especially in its opposition to conservative formalism. This, in turn, authorized “a bolder, more lively engagement with the world” (101). Indeed, according to von Frank, because of this development Transcendentalism came to form “the active, articulate core” of the “progressive climate of opinion” of the time (106). Add the incendiary influence of the Burns affair, and “Transcendentalism, deployed as antislavery, becomes revolution” (261). Ultimately, that revolution would culminate in the Civil War.

The only quibble I have with this very fine study is that, because of its emphasis on events in 1854, it tends to create the impression that Emerson was less than active in the antislavery movement prior to this time. Thus, the author states that “Emerson began in June 1854 to involve himself in such unaccustomed activities as political organization, local committee work, petitioning the governor, and raising funds for Kansas emigrants” (329). In actuality, Emerson was deeply involved in such matters long before 1854. For example, he signed on to many petitions, both state and Federal, beginning in the 1830s. Probably the most famous of these concerned the removal of the Cherokees in 1838 (which also resulted in his famous public letter to President Van Buren). He began his campaign as an anti-slavery orator in earnest in 1844 (his first speech on the topic was in 1837) with his famous “Address on the Emancipation of the Negroes in the British West Indies” and he would speak several more times on the topic before the end of the decade. He also attended many public protest meetings, especially in Concord, regarding such matters as the Cherokee removal, the annexation of Texas, and the expulsion of his neighbor, Samuel Hoar, from South Carolina in 1844. Finally, his involvement in the political process, which he always considered important, reached new heights in the spring of 1851 when he actively served as a stump orator in John Gorham Palfrey’s unsuccessful bid for a Congressional seat on the Free-soil ticket from Emerson’s Middlesex district. It is certainly true, however, that Emerson’s antislavery activities accelerated in response to the various crises of the 1850s and the Burns case was one of the most significant.

Overall, this is a marvelous study; meticulously researched, superbly written, a major contribution to our understanding of Emerson and his world.

—LEN GOUGEON  
University of Scranton



— IN MEMORIAM —  
DAVID EMERSON  
1916-1998

David Emerson, Ralph Waldo Emerson's great-grandson and former president of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association, died 1 December 1998 in Elizabeth City, N.C., where he had been living in retirement since 1987. Born in Concord, Massachusetts, he graduated from Harvard College in 1938 and became a fighter pilot in the Army Air Corps during World War II. After the war he worked for the investment firm of J. M. Forbes & Co. in Boston, eventually becoming a partner. Devoted to his birthplace, he served in many capacities in Concord town affairs and was one of the co-founders of the Concord Land Conservation Trust.

Older Emersonians will remember his commitment to the various projects which, beginning in the 1950s, began to publish textually reliable editions of the manuscripts of his famous ancestor. Disclaiming any particular aptitude for literature or philosophy himself, he nevertheless encouraged and supported the efforts of two generations of scholars to make the letters, lectures, journals and notebooks of Emerson available to both specialists and the wider public. Every summer from the 1960s through the early 1980s he invited those Emersonians who were staying in Cambridge to join him for an extended lunch in one or another of his favorite restaurants in Boston, where his genial spirit reflected the well-known courtliness of his great-grandfather. What Emerson says of the gentleman in "Manners," that "the word denotes good-nature or benevolence: manhood first, and then gentleness," that a gentleman "is good company for pirates, and good with academicians," will always serve, to the academicians who knew him in those days, as an apt description of David Emerson.

—Ralph H. Orth



David Emerson died 1 December 1998 at his home in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, where he retired several years ago. He and his wife, Mary, built a home on the Great Dismal Swamp, far removed culturally and geographically from their home on the Concord River. They moved there partly for the seclusion and partly to be near Kitty Hawk.

David was a great-grandson of Ralph Waldo Emerson, though it was later in life that he developed a keener interest in his lineage. He was proud of his ancestry but he felt hampered by it. He often thought he was asked to serve or honored because of his great-grandfather, not because of his merits.

David was a man of conservative politics and values. Once in a conversation about the Revolution I mentioned his ancestor, William, as having been chaplain to the Minutemen. David replied that had he been alive then, he would have been on the other side.

He was a kindly man. At the centenary commemoration of RW's death (David always referred to him by his initials) he came across a man from Australia who had come to Concord to attend the ceremonies. David invited him to join the family and intimate friends for dinner at the Emerson House.

David was a modest man and enjoyed the stories and opinions of others more than his own. He had a splendid self-effacing humor and laughed heartily. He was devoted to his family, his Navion airplane, and a variety of sports. He was a refined man of easy tastes; sometimes his Concord homestead more resembled a menagerie. He enjoyed working around the land and tinkering with his airplane. He spoke little of his own accomplishments.

He was active in Concord town affairs in a variety of activities. He was especially interested in conservation issues.

David was patriotic and proud that his family had so strong a part in the history of the country. It was a sad part of his life that the Emersons had lost a son in every war, including his own son, William, in the Vietnam War.

David is survived by his wife, Mary, four daughters, three sons, a sister and a brother. He was a life-long member of the First Parish in Concord, where memorial services were held.

David inherited a vast cultural tradition and he did well by it. He welcomed strangers, gave to causes without attribution, and was open to all opinions except sham and hypocrisy.

—Frank Schulman